



MI NETS



STATES



NETS

**Michigan Network of Employers for Traffic Safety****Editor: Dan Vartanian****Telephone: (517) 333-5322, Fax: (517) 333-5756, E-mail: [vartanid@michigan.gov](mailto:vartanid@michigan.gov)****Fall 1998**

## The Education of a Lifetime

*by John H. Bishop, Jr.*



*Michigan NETS Advisory Board member, John Bishop of Detroit Edison shares his "Saved by the Belt" story. "If we can change your behavior and convince you to wear your safety belt, I know we have an opportunity to save your Life!"*

**A**fter having spent the previous day preparing my daughter's articles for school, that night reviewing my do's and don'ts, the next day loading my Chevy Blazer from top to bottom with a school years of "you don't have to come back home for anything" articles, I set off with my daughter Heidi to Soumi College in Hancock, Michigan. My wife and I believed that 410 miles away from home was a good distance to remove those social issues that could be a distraction from studying. By the time the snow melted in May, Heidi would have read a book.

Somewhere around the small town of Indian River, darkness set in and my resolve to get to Hancock waned. With heavy eyelids I informed my daughter we would stop and get some sleep. In her last effort of persuasion, that which was left over from her non-convincing argument for another College in the civilized word, she overcame my long standing rule...I let her drive. It was just the two of us; the weather was clear on that moonlit night, so why not show some confidence.

I never believed in being held hostage by seat belts. My family had always criticized me for my stubborn attitude, but I wanted the latitude to "get out" if the need arose. Considering myself an intelligent person, I remembered my families' arguments on the use of seat belts, and who was driving. I now was a passenger and not in control of the vehicle. So...I buckled up.

I don't know when my daughter or I went to sleep. I just know I went first and she yelled last. I woke to find she had become mesmerized by the silence of darkness and went off the left side of the roadway. When she woke, she pulled the wheel sharp to the right in an attempt to get off the shoulder, back onto the highway. In some way, the truck flipped over on the roof. As we were traveling upside down, down the highway, with sparks coming in through the broken windshield, I was telling Heidi not to worry. We were on the pavement

and would stop. Good theory, wrong results.

Unknown to us, we were traveling on an angle. Our belted in torsos traveled 5008 down the highway, then to the opposite shoulder, where we rolled over five times down the steep embankment. The truck came to rest on all four wheels, minus all the glass in the truck and our belongings, but with our belted in lives, without a scratch. When the State Police arrived and viewed the wreckage, they asked "where are the bodies?" It wasn't a spirit that answered, but a re-born believer in the use of seat belts.

Since that experience I've learned to listen to my wife first, and adhere to those people who know more than I about my safety. Because of the use of seat belts I am able to tell you of our episode, and can save this article for my three grandchildren. Heidi loves to tell this story to her children of how granddad grew up in one night.



## **1997 Traffic Crash Picture—Fatalities Drop**

**M**ichigan's traffic fatalities declined in 1997, down nearly 4 percentage points from 1996. Recent data shows Michigan recorded 1,446 traffic fatalities, down from 1,505 in 1996, according to the Michigan State Police, Office of Highway Safety Planning (OHSP).

Traffic safety experts at the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute said that it is normal to expect a 2–5 percent variation in fatalities overall from year to year. Any change beyond this would be cause for further investigation.

"A decrease in fatalities is always good news," said Betty J. Mercer, OHSP division director. "While we view every traffic related death as a tragedy, this positive trend is encouraging and should motivate us to continue in our efforts to further reduce traffic fatalities."

For the first time in four years, the total number of traffic crashes declined, down 2.2 percent, from 435,477 in 1996 to 425,806 in 1997.

## **Car-Deer Collisions**

**M**ost people are surprised at the devastating damage caused to a vehicle involved in a car-deer collision. In fact, most car-deer collisions are serious, causing an average of \$1,500 in damage. In Michigan there were more than 65,000 reported car-deer collisions in 1997, which was a significant increase over previous years. That's more than 178 every day and equates to more than \$95 million in damages each year!

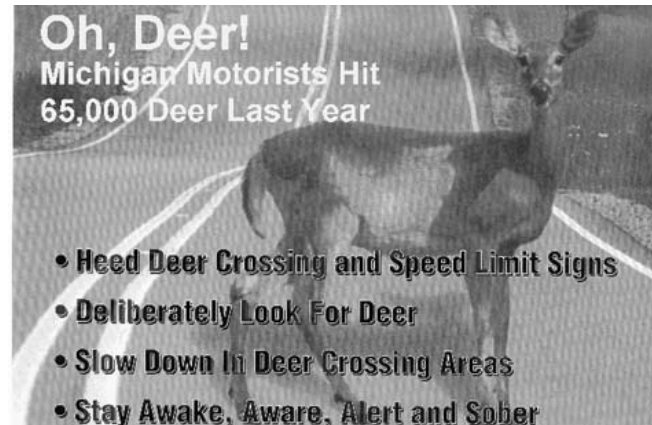
Worse still, car-deer collisions often result in serious injury or even death; in 1997 there were 1,899 persons injured and three people who died as a result of car-deer collisions on Michigan roadways. Too often motorists are injured while taking evasive action to avoid striking a deer, resulting in a collision with a fixed object or another vehicle.

According to the Department of Natural Resources, the Michigan deer population continues to grow, so this problem is not going away. The following are some interesting facts to keep in mind:

- The majority of car-deer collisions occur during the months of October through December. However, these collisions occur every month of the year, so always stay alert.
- Most car-deer collisions occur between 6 PM and midnight, so be especially cautious during this time of the day.
- Most car-deer collisions occur on rural two-lane roadways.
- Deer are found even in highly populated areas.

Michigan NETS and Michigan State Police Troopers remind you to keep your eyes on the road, never drink and drive, always wear your safety belt, and consider the following tips to help you avoid a car-deer collision:

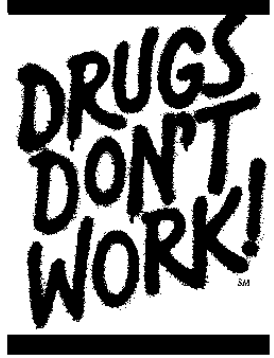
- Use special caution in those areas marked with deer crossing signs.
- If you see one deer, expect there will be others. Slow down and be alert.
- Do not swerve your vehicle to avoid striking a deer. It is better to strike a deer than another vehicle or a fixed object.
- Continually scan the fields and area adjacent to the roadway for deer. Often you can see them approaching the roadway and can slow down.
- During hours of darkness use your bright lights when no traffic is approaching. The high beams will illuminate the eyes of deer on the roadway or approaching the roadway much sooner, allowing a greater reaction time.
- Always drive at a safe and prudent speed.



# An Ounce of Prevention—the DRUGS DON'T WORK Program

by Susan Combs, Executive Director, DRUGS DON'T WORK Program

**T**he old saying "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" certainly holds true for employers trying to protect their company and their employees from the high cost of substance abuse. With 74% of drug users being employed either full-time or part-time, a drug-free workplace program can be a powerful ally in halting the destruction of drug use. And with 98% of the Fortune 500 companies offering such a program, the substance abuse problem becomes intensely magnified for small and medium-sized companies. However, assistance is available to combat this costly problem.



The DRUGS DON'T WORK program at the Michigan Chamber of Commerce Foundation assists employers in developing a drug-free workplace program tailored to an individual company's needs. The ideal program consists of three easy-to-implement components, but each employer is free to choose which elements will work best in its company culture.

To start, a company should have a policy. The DRUGS DON'T WORK program offers several samples of company policies drafted by labor law attorneys. The next recommended component is drug testing. And the third suggested component is an Employee Assistance Program, a low-cost employee benefit which offers short-term counseling and referral for employees and their family members. Most Employee Assistance Program packages also include employee education and supervisory training. The DRUGS DON'T WORK program provides referrals to top quality drug testing firms and Employee Assistance Programs.

By offering these three easy components, an employer will be better protected from the many costs associated with substance abusing employees—higher absenteeism, higher accident rates, higher workers compensation rates, low morale, increased theft.

Success stories abound from employers that have implemented drug-free workplace programs. The last lost-time accident for a small construction company in Kalamazoo was over three years ago, an unparalleled experience in the construction industry. In addition, the company's workers compensation rates are 50% lower. An automobile dealership in Florida saw a 30% reduction in sick leave days following implementation of their program. For a 30-employee custom cabinetry firm in Ohio, their drug-free workplace program greatly assisted in employee retention. The company witnessed a 50% decline in turnover, a much-needed improvement in these days of low unemployment rates.

The DRUGS DON'T WORK Program is available because of the generosity of such contributors as Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Michigan, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Botsford General Hospital, GTE, and several others. For more information about the DRUGS DON'T WORK program, call Susan Combs at 800-748-0266. An ounce of prevention may be your best investment this year.

# Everything an Employer Should Want to Know About Belts & Alcohol\*

**\*But Were Afraid to Ask**

**A**s an employer, you should provide your employees with policies about safety belts, alcohol-and drug-free driving, and unsafe driving practices. Written traffic safety policies clearly communicated to employees are excellent ways to inform them of your company's practices. The added bonus is that safe driving habits ingrained at work often continue off the job, benefiting an employee's family, friends and community.

We've outlined samples of alcohol and safety belt policies for your use and invite you to adapt them for your business.

## Sample Alcohol Use Policy



"This company has a vital interest in maintaining safe, healthy and efficient working conditions for its employees. The consumption of alcohol by any employee during "duty hours" is prohibited. Duty hours consist of all working hours, including break periods and on-call periods, regardless of whether on- or off-company premises. Being under the influence of alcohol while performing company business or while in a company facility is prohibited. An employee under the influence may affect the safety of co-workers or members of the public, his or her job performance, or the safe and efficient operation of the company facility. The use of alcohol during non-working hours under circumstances that this company determines adversely affect the company's regard or reputation in the community is also prohibited."

## Sample Safety Belt use Policy



"This company recognizes that safety belt use is an important and effective means of protecting our employees. Reducing injuries and deaths associated with the lack of safety belt use can strengthen our effectiveness as a company. Safety belts should always be used while traveling on official business and employees should operate the vehicle only after others are buckled-up. This policy statement is to recognize the importance of wearing safety belts and to establish mandatory belt use as a policy of the highest priority. Therefore, we are implementing the following policy:

Safety belts shall be used at all times by drivers and passengers. In addition, helmets are required when riding a motorcycle or bicycle on company business. We encourage you to use belts and helmets on your own time as well because we value you and want you to be safe at all times."

If you would like additional information on this subject, please contact Dan Vartanian, Michigan NETS Coordinator at (517) 333-5322

## Road Rage

**D**angerous driving behaviors are becoming more common on crowded roads and causing concern for road users, safety advocates and professionals. This phenomenon, known as aggressive driving-or road rage in its most extreme form—is a challenge to law enforcement and safety professionals. There is, however, an increased awareness among traffic safety professionals, researchers, and road users on this subject. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety studied more than 10,000 incidents of violent aggressive driving committed between 1990 and 1996. The study found that at least 218 people were killed and another 12,610 injured when drivers got angry. This study may be just the tip of the iceberg and does not give us the full picture. According to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, one-third of the 6.5 million injury crashes and two-thirds of fatal crashes (36,223) can be attributed to aggressive driving.

## Drowsy Driving and Crashes Studied by NCSDR, NHTSA\*

**T**he National Center on Sleep Disorder Research (NCSDR) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) have issued a report to combat drowsy driving.

Risks identified as contributing to drowsy driving include sleep loss, late-night and/or long driving patterns, use of sedating medications, untreated or unrecognized sleep disorders, and consumption of alcohol. Population groups at highest risk are young males (ages 16–29), shift workers, and people with untreated sleep apnea syndrome and narcolepsy.

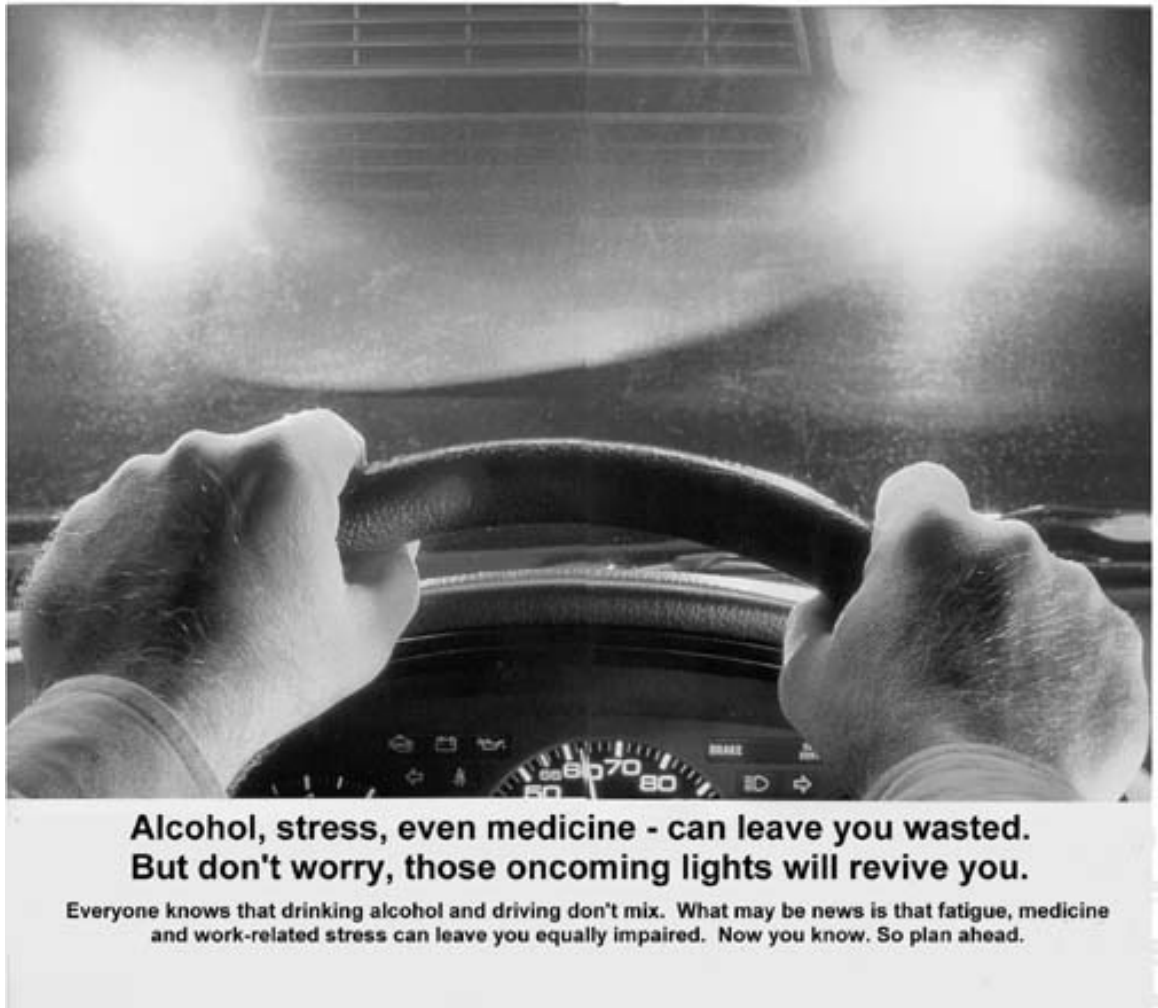
To prevent drowsy driving and its consequences, Americans need information on approaches that may reduce their risks. The public needs to be informed of the benefits of specific behaviors that help avoid becoming drowsy while driving. Helpful behaviors include (1) planning to get sufficient sleep, (2) not drinking even small amounts of alcohol when sleepy, and (3) limiting driving between midnight and 6 a.m. As soon as a driver becomes sleepy, the key behavioral step is to stop driving—for example, letting a passenger drive or stopping to sleep before continuing a trip. Two remedial actions can make a short-term difference in driving alertness: taking a short nap (about 15 to 20 minutes) and consuming caffeine equivalent to two cups of coffee. The effectiveness of any other steps to improve alertness when sleepy, such as opening a window or listening to the radio, has not been demonstrated.

Employers, unions, and shift work employees need to be informed about effective measures they can take to reduce sleepiness resulting from shift work schedules. Countermeasures include following effective strategies from scheduling shift changes and, when shift work precludes normal nighttime sleep, planning a time and an environment to obtain sufficient restorative sleep.

Several studies show that timed exposure to bright light has been successful in helping shift workers to overcome circadian phase disruption. This approach promotes longer, uninterrupted sleep, which may help reduce sleepiness on the job and behind the wheel.

The report is available on the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration website in the "What's New" section or can be accessed directly at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/performance/human/%20drowsy.html>.





# NEWS

## YOU CAN USE

A new poster is available from the Michigan Resource Center (MRC) featuring a Michigan law enforcement officer with a message for drunk drivers: "Meet your designated driver." The poster, catalog number OHSP 129, can be obtained by faxing your order with a complete street address to (517) 882-7778 or by calling MRC at 1-800-626-4636.

The popular Vice and Larry Crash Dummy costumes are available for loan at no charge from many locations throughout the state. If you have an event that these costumes could be utilized to promote the importance of wearing safety belts, please contact NETS Coordinator, Dan Vartanian for the agency nearest you. Contact Mr. Vartanian at (517) 333-5322.

### 1997 Michigan Traffic Crash Facts

- A person was killed approximately every six hours as a result of a traffic crash.

- For each person killed, there were 95.1 persons injured in crashes.
- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death and injury in the workplace.
- The majority of all crashes occurred during daylight hours.
- Fatal crashes were twice as prevalent among male drivers than female drivers.
- A fatality in a crash is seven times more likely when one of the crash-involved operators is reported as had been drinking.
- Occupants in crashes were eleven times more likely to be killed if they were not wearing their restraints.